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The National Institutes of Health

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

Public Health Service

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U. S. National Institutes of Health

The National Institutes of Health

The National Institutes of Health is an agency of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Its mission is to improve the health of our citizens.

It carries out this mission through four main activities: 1. Research to learn more about what causes disease and new ways to overcome it; 2. Provision to non-profit institutions of facilities for research and medical education, such as buildings, animals, equipment, and library services; 3. Training of men and women to carry on research; and 4. Education of physicians and allied health professionals to bring the results of research into practice.

The NIH traces its history back to 1887 when the chief threats to the health of Americans were epidemic diseases caused by micro-organisms, such as cholera and yellow fever. Epidemic diseases caused by micro-organisms still threaten the health of Americans, although influenza and measles have replaced yellow fever and cholera as health dangers here in the United States. Much NIH research is still directed to finding means of controlling the infectious diseases, whether by better and faster diagnostic tests, improved medical treatment or vaccines.

In addition, however, other diseases have emerged as the principal serious threats to the life and health of our citizens. Chief among the new research targets are diseases of the heart and blood vessels, including strokes; cancer; arthritis and the rheumatic diseases generally; neurologic diseases such as parkinsonism and multiple sclerosis; and the condition which is not so much a threat to life or health as a tragic affliction—

mental retardation. For all of these, NIH seeks knowledge leading to cure or prevention. And as that knowledge is acquired, word of it is made available to physicians everywhere through library communications facilities, while at the same time NIH is educating more men and women to apply the new knowledge in treatment of patients.

The National Institutes of Health is located at Bethesda, Md., a suburb of Washington, D.C. Here, on a 300-acre "campus," it maintains hundreds of laboratories, a 516-bed clinical research facility known as the Clinical Center, and the 1,500,000-volume National Library of Medicine. It is from the NIH laboratories and clinics that have come such health advances as the first chemical cure of a solid cancer and a vaccine against rubella, or German measles. And from the great library here treasures of knowledge are made available to physicians and research scientists to help them advance the attack on unconquered diseases.

NIH, however, does more than furnish national library services and conduct research in its own laboratories and clinics. It serves as administrator of Federal funds which help support the efforts to improve health made by scientists in universities, medical schools, hospitals, clinics and other non-profit research and teaching institutions. Over three-fourths of the NIH funds are appropriated to support these Nation-wide activities for improvement of the health of the people of the United States.

Here, briefly, is how it is done. The eight Institutes of the NIH award individual research grants, and also award fellowships and training grants whereby a pool of future research scientists will be maintained. Some of the individual grants or fellowships are for research or training in research closely related to the interest of a particular Institute—for example, heart, cancer, arthritis, or dental diseases. Others are less specific but apply to sciences that underpin the specific disease studies. These may be awarded by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (see last page for list of Institutes and other components).

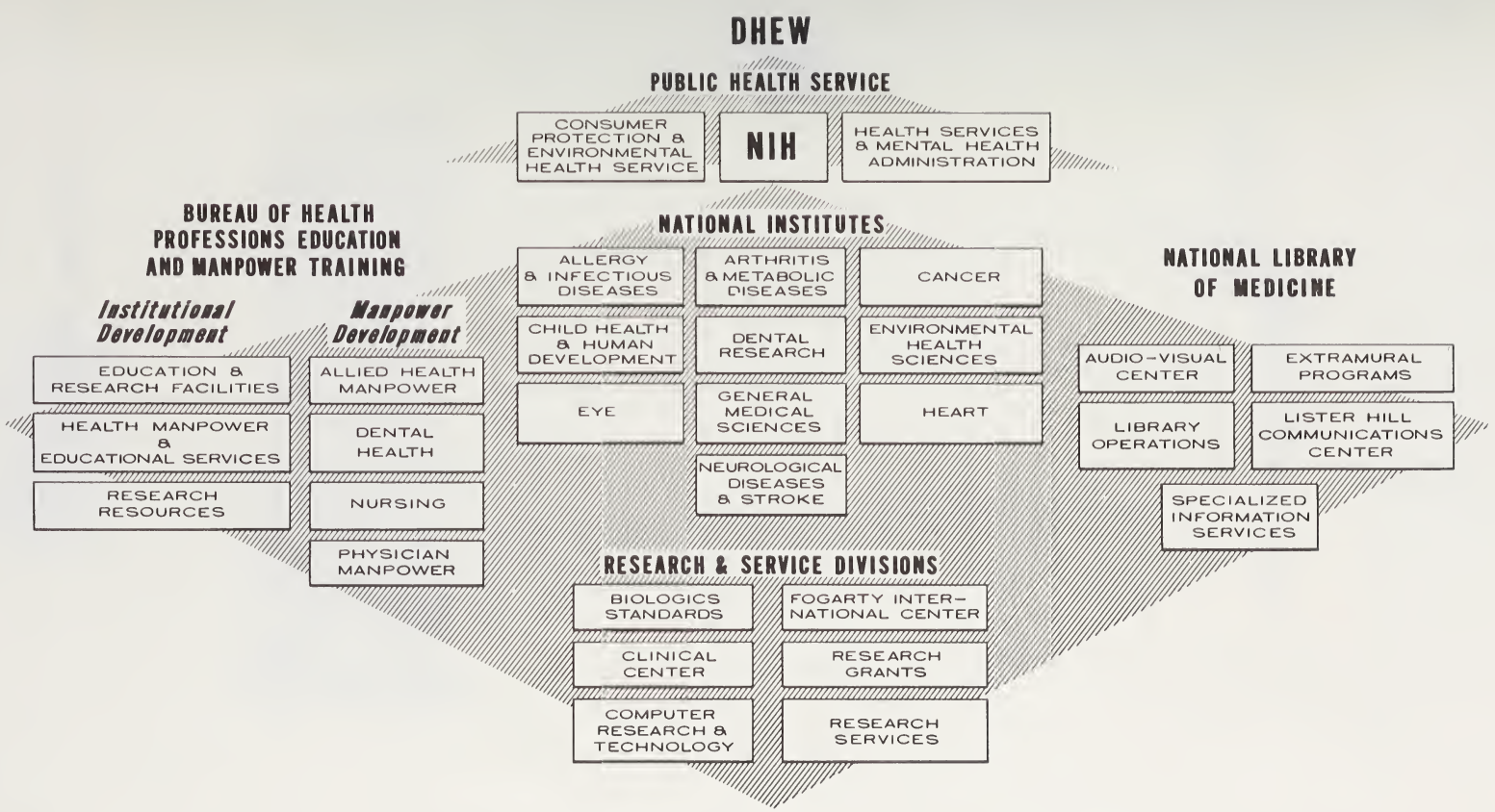
NIH also awards grants to help in construction or renovation of laboratories for special research resources, such as very large and costly equipment to be used by scientists within an entire region, for general clinical research centers, and animal study centers. It also provides general research support grants to permit an institution more flexibility in its research than is possible through other grants.

In its regulatory function, NIH has responsibility for the safety, purity and potency of all vaccines, blood, serums, antitoxins and other biological products sold in interstate commerce or exported. It sets standards for these and licenses the products and the manufacturers.

Important among the NIH components is the Bureau of Health Manpower, which, through grants to schools of medicine, nursing, dentistry and other health professions, seeks to increase the supply of trained men

and women who can make direct use of the ever-increasing fund of knowledge for improving the health of Americans—and, indeed, of people everywhere, since the fruits of biomedical research are not limited to any one nation or region of the world.

In its history of more than 80 years NIH has been responsive to change: changes in health needs and aspirations; changes in opportunities for the development of new knowledge; and even changes brought about by the success of its programs. The U.S. Congress, representing the people, has been keenly aware of these changes as it has given the NIH new functions and new responsibilities. But today, as in 1887, the mission of NIH remains unchanged; and in the search for better health—more intense, more refined—it continues to serve the people here in the United States and throughout the world.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